

## ***Depression and Older Americans***

Depression is not a normal part of aging, but unfortunately, many older Americans and their caregivers believe it is, and depression in the elderly often goes overlooked and untreated. Although older Americans may experience many losses in later life such as changes in health status or relocation of loved ones, the majority of seniors cope with these losses without becoming clinically depressed. However, if a depressed mood lingers for a long period of time, it may be clinical depression. Oftentimes the symptoms of depression are missed because they coincide with other illnesses of later life. Depression takes the pleasure out of daily life, it can often aggravate other medical conditions found in later life, and when overlooked it can lead to suicide. But it doesn't have to; clinical depression can be treated successfully in over 80% of all cases.

### ***Get the Facts***

- Depression is not a normal part of aging, but over 58% of older Americans think it is.
- Late-life depression affects some 6 million Americans; most of them women, but only 10% of these persons ever get treated.
- Depressive symptoms occur in approximately 15% of community residents over 65 years of age. Rates of depression in nursing homes are up to 25% in some areas.
- Depression often goes undetected because patients do not report their symptoms, and when they do, they are often misinterpreted as symptoms of a medical illness.
- Older adults are considered the group most at risk for suicide. The suicide rate in older Americans is more than 50% higher than young people or the nation as a whole. Many of these suicides (up to two-thirds) are often attributed to depression that went untreated or misdiagnosed.
- A quarter of all suicides occur in the elderly and are particularly associated with depressive disorder. White men over age 80 are six times more likely to commit suicide than any other demographic group.
- Older patients with significant symptoms of depression have roughly 50% higher healthcare costs than non-depressed seniors.
- Clinical depression can be triggered by other chronic illnesses common in later life such as diabetes, stroke, heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and arthritis.
- Up to 40% of people continue to experience depression over time.

### ***Attitudes of Seniors Towards Depression***

- 68% of Americans aged 65 and over know little or almost nothing about depression.
- Only 38% of Americans aged 65 and over believe that depression is a "health" problem.

- If suffering from depression, older Americans are more likely than any other group to "handle it themselves." Only 42% would seek help from a health professional.

### *Learn to recognize the symptoms of clinical depression*

No two people experience clinical depression in the same manner. Symptoms will vary in severity and duration among different people. See your doctor\* if you experience five or more of the following symptoms for more than two weeks:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Sleeping too little, early morning awakening, or sleeping too much
- Reduced appetite and/or weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, including sex
- Restlessness, irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as headaches, chronic pain or digestive disorders)
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- As a first step, a thorough physical examination may be recommended to rule out other illnesses.

### *Help Is Available*

**NMHA Campaign for America's Mental Health** **1-800-969-6642**

**The American Association of Retired Persons** **1-800-424-3410**

**Depression Awareness, Recognition and Treatment (D/ART) Program** **1-800-421-4211**

**National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)** **1-800-950-NAMI**

**NMCSD Senior Wellness Program.**